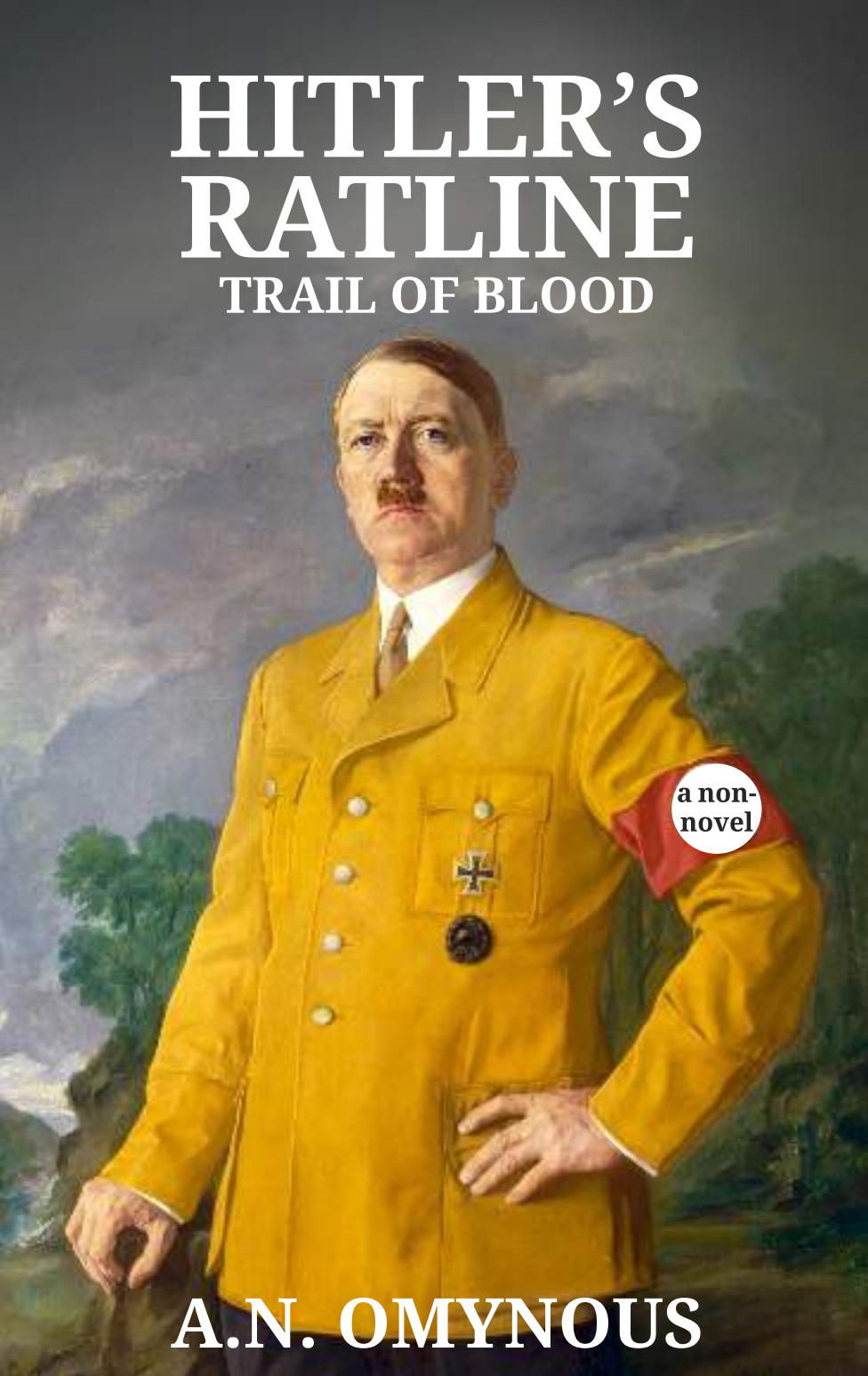
HITLER'S RATLINE

TRAIL OF BLOOD



A.N. OMYNOUS

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FLAT-CIRCLE BOOKS
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PART I
ROUTED

CHAPTER 1
THE DURESS REHEARSAL

Adolf Hitler was seated on his study sofa, finally at the end of his tyrannical, practically satanic reign over Germany—along with Eva Braun, who had been his lover her entire adult life. A stream of blood dripped from Hitler's right temple, being the apparent cause of a stain on the sofa and a dark puddle on the floor. His head was canted over slightly and his eyelids were nearly shut. His hand still loosely gripped his pistol.

A backup gun sat on the coffee table near Hitler, along with weapons for Braun in case she decided to use one. She had instead opted for cyanide, as did several others in the bunker to avoid capture by the Soviet Union. Braun's unmoving lips were puckered in a parodic kiss

of death. Her legs were pulled up on the couch, her knees angled toward Hitler.

Schutzstaffel officer and Hitler's chief valet, Heinz Linge, was the first to enter the room. His eyes went to the suicide weapon, which he had recently brought to Hitler. The dictator had owned the handgun since the beginning of the war, when Linge entered his current position. The latter satisfied another personal request by looking at Hitler's head wound, as someone needed to make a sober observation of the forensic details. Then Linge left the room with his chin lowered.

Otto Günsche, a tall SS officer and Hitler's personal adjutant, came in and weaved around the sofa and armchairs, collecting the pistols from the table. He exited the room almost as if he had seen no one else there, living or dead.

Martin Bormann, a Nazi Party official and private secretary to Hitler, stepped just inside the doorway. He made an audible gasp and a grasping gesture with his hands. Then he made a sardonic sign of the cross and lit a cigar on his way out of the room.

Hitler Youth leader Artur Axmann, who had been subordinate only to Hitler himself, entered with a reverence that the others did not demonstrate. Although in his early thirties, his connection to the children of Nazi Germany often imparted to him a fresh inquisitiveness. He kneeled to look at Hitler directly in the face.

First, his eyes were drawn to Hitler's, which he thought he could see moving underneath the eyelids before ascribing it to a trick of the flickering light.

Axmann noticed that a blood stream had not only dripped from Hitler's right temple, but a corresponding faint pattern appeared on the left side, despite there being no observable exit wound. Hitler's mouth was slightly askew, a defect to his grim mask of death. Axmann was almost satisfied with this final look, but did a double take as he noticed red smeared around Hitler's lips. He wondered if it was from a last kiss from Braun before realizing she had no lipstick on. Axmann turned to see Günsche waiting for him, then exited the room, which the adjutant stayed to guard.

Inside the quiet study, the two bodies slowly came back to life. Braun's eyes and lips relaxed and she tilted her head from side to side to get her blood pumping, feeling every bit like a reanimated corpse. Hitler let in a short breath and exhaled a sigh of relief. His most valuable theatrical act was the one in which he had done nothing but sit as still as a statue. His slack-jawed performance had been bolstered by an injection of cocaine to the gums, which he was going to need to achieve his next great feat.

Braun wiped the blood from her lover's temples. Its source was from the operation to Hitler's oral cavity that he had been undergoing

in stages. Braun was anxious to return Hitler to his doctor, waiting in the adjacent bedroom, but an important appointment had to be kept. This event would set the clock in real time, with the key eyewitnesses transferring their authentic observations of the couple's lifeless bodies to the appropriate moment.

A knock came at the door, activating the clock. Hitler cracked the door open and upon seeing Linge, opened it wider. Linge feigned a look of sadness, but Hitler could tell that his valet was merely anxious and tired. He asked Hitler why he didn't save himself and break out from Berlin. Hitler affirmed that his choice had been made. He would die as a martyr of Germany due to its treacherous defeat by Jews and Marxists. Linge shook his head in disbelief and asked what the troops should continue fighting for.

"For the coming man," Hitler declared in a steady voice.

Hitler was known to avoid flinching even while undergoing extremely painful procedures with no medication. For this extreme operation, however, a sequence of cocaine injections was being utilized to deeply numb the gums before severing the jawbone's nerves. Hitler's surgeon, Ludwig Stumpfegger, had already incised the gums, the cause of the red smears that Hitler had been unable to keep from adorning his lips.

Stumpfegger sliced deeper than before,

producing a steady stream of blood that poured over the mattress and onto the bed frame. Hitler whimpered and let his hands tremble, a chronic symptom of fatigue that he could normally subdue. He bit deep into a wooden stake and breathed deeply to prepare for the impending explosion of pain. Braun leaned out of the room into the study, then nodded to Stumpfegger.

"Are you ready, *mein Führer*?" the doctor asked.

Hitler locked eyes with Braun. Her steady gaze informed him that all was going to plan, with his guard standing by. She gripped his bare shoulders in support, all but closing her eyes.

Meanwhile, SS official Heinrich Müller went from the study to the anteroom to check on his guards. He signaled to Günsche, who marched to the telephone. He called Hitler's chauffeur, Erich Kempka, and told him to collect as much petrol as possible to burn the leader's body. As the fuel supply pipeline had been cut off by the Soviet bombardment, Kempka would have to collect gas from damaged vehicles in the Chancellery garage.

Stumpfegger sanitized his scalpel before making the first climactic cut. All feeling in Hitler's jawbone would be depleted, but the trauma would likely prevent further surgery until the dictator reached Spain. Hitler had insisted on beginning the process in Berlin because his time in Barcelona would be short.

As Stumpfegger severed the alveolar nerve, Hitler released a hellish howl. Stumpfegger stuffed his patient's cheek with cotton padding soaked with analgesics. He then proceeded to cut the nerve on the mandible's opposite side, again causing a tormentful bellow.

Müller entered the room upon hearing the painful cries, followed by two SS guards. They moved Hitler onto the floor as the doctor packed his tools. Müller ordered the guards to take the bloody mattress into the conference room and set it alight, along with any other furniture in the room. They returned minutes later. The men each grabbed one of Hitler's limbs while Braun kept his head inclined.

The group carried Hitler through the vacant corridor. Braun struggled to angle his head to keep his airway unobstructed. She pulled the blood-soaked cotton out of Hitler's mouth, which Stumpfegger replenished. The group ascended the spiral staircase leading to the exit. As one of the guards opened the door and secured the exit, blood regularly squirted from Hitler's mouth for several seconds.

Back in the bunker, Linge checked his pocket watch for the umpteenth time. He finally returned to Hitler's quarters, only a couple of hours after he had left it, although it felt like longer. Leaving Bormann in the antechamber, he entered the study alone. It was empty and quiet, as he expected. He entered the bathroom

and found his workload waiting in the bathtub. Two bodies from the morgue, one male and one female, had been wrapped in woolen blankets. Linge moved both corpses to the study. He took a second to catch his breath, then pulled Hitler's Walther PP from his jacket. Standing near the sofa, he pulled the trigger, exhausting a blank and releasing the scent of gunpowder. Günsche cracked the door open and nodded to him. Their crucial work was underway.

Günsche walked to the conference room, where several other officers were waiting. He informed them that the chief and his wife were dead and that Linge was wrapping their bodies in blankets to be taken outside and burned. Günsche refreshed Axmann's memory about what they had supposedly seen only minutes earlier.

"Did you notice, Artur? No exit wound on the left temple. The boss shot himself through the mouth," Günsche explained. He used his hands to mimic an exploding cranium. Axmann nodded in agreement.

Günsche, Bormann, and Kempka led the procession of the bodies up the stairway and a couple of meters into the garden. The Soviet shelling had gotten too close and accurate to risk any further excursion. Kempka showed the men the nine cans of petrol he had found. They used all of it to douse the corpses. Günsche and Kempka tried to start a fire, but their matches

went out too quickly. Linge went back inside the bunker and retrieved some documents from the war room. Bormann lit the crumpled bundle and threw it, igniting the bodies. Crowded safely inside the bunker doorway, the men were joined by a few other officers and propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. Together, they saluted Hitler one last time.

CHAPTER 2
ESCAPE FROM BERLIN

In March 1945, Hitler had publicly surfaced from the *Führerbunker* a final time to be filmed thanking a group of young soldiers continuing to defend the Fatherland. His fatigued nerves, a result of the stress and lack of rest over the last two decades, had caused a muscular contraction and a visible hand tremor, especially in his left hand. Following a suggestion by Goebbels, he purposely exaggerated his trembling around witnesses to suggest his failing health.

Goebbels and his wife, passionately loyal to Hitler, had agreed to die in the plot they had helped hatch. With his leg brace and rattish features, Goebbels was too recognizable to evade detection, and the couple would have no chance of being able to secretly relocate with

their well-known children. The six kids would be poisoned in their beds when the end finally came.

In early April, Braun melodramatically arrived at the bunker and made known her plan to stay. The fall of Berlin, after all, was to be the climax of Hitler's great opera, and he was due his share of tragic romance.

On April 22, high-ranking Nazi official Hermann Göring, supreme commander of the Air Force, learned of Hitler's plan to kill himself. He sent the dictator a telegram suggesting that he himself assume leadership of the Third Reich. Bormann intercepted the message and seized upon the opportunity to position himself within the *Führer*'s favor, presenting Göring's ploy as treason. As he predicted, Hitler was enraged. Göring was sacked and placed under house arrest, to be replaced by field marshal Robert Ritter von Greim.

Von Greim thought that a helicopter might be the only way to land in besieged Berlin, so he asked famed Nazi stunt pilot Hanna Reitsch to meet him in Munich. They took a series of short flights, with some fighter support, to southwestern Berlin. From there, von Greim piloted a small plane until his foot was hit by a bullet. Reitsch climbed halfway over his shoulders to land the plane in the historic Tiergarten. The street lamps had been removed from the main street leading from the

neoclassical Brandenburg Gate to serve as a temporary airstrip.

It was a short stay in the bunker. Von Greim and Reitsch, a bit of a romantic pair, stated their willingness to die with Hitler, who gave both a cyanide pill from Stumpfegger's supply. Their luck soon changed, as with one last glimmer of hope, the dictator outlined a new directive. The pair would fly out and order the general of a nearby field army to disengage his battalion from its current engagements and come save the capital. The duo made their exit from the bunker a little after midnight on the morning of April 29.

Then, with about a day and a half before they intended to vanish, Hitler and Braun were fatefully married. After a brief and intimate ceremony, breakfast was provided in the conference room while Hitler disappeared to dictate his last will and testament. His dietitian, the 25-year-old Constanze Manziarly, restocked refreshments until the gathering ended. Like Hitler's private secretaries, she had pledged to stay with him till death and was provided a poison capsule.

Later in the night, the women of Hitler's inner circle convened in his study, where he hosted a special "tea party". He used these gatherings to deliver monologues of his triumphs and sufferings—often fatiguing his audience. Lately, the topics had become more

religious, simultaneously mourning the end of the Reich while treading around the idea that Hitler himself was the second coming of Christ. The idea had been stated as fact by the Nazi Party after its diversion from the church, which the unlikely messiah had indicated that he would eventually subvert. Tonight, however, brought slight relief, as Hitler's wedding gave him a reason to—at least passingly—discuss someone besides himself.

As the rambling came to an end, Braun asked Manziarly to stay as the secretaries went to seek a few hours of rest in the war room. Hitler approached his cook and told her that he would like spaghetti and bread for his last supper. She consented to the simple request. Both Hitler and Braun seemed to be weirdly devouring her with their eyes. After the couple had reached some secret agreement, the tired girl was allowed to leave.

The next night, Hitler announced to his inner circle that his suicide would take place that day, April 30. He would allow the occupants of the bunker to attempt break-outs after his demise, with poison reserved for their potential capture by the Allies. Then he laid down for a sleepless night under his doctor's care.

That afternoon, Reitsch secretly returned to the Reich Chancellery. She had flown von Greim a short distance to a connecting airfield, but now had an itinerary that took priority over

saving Berlin. She had returned in a Junkers Ju 52, an airliner that could transport twenty people if needed, but the passenger list was much smaller. She encountered Müller in the Chancellery. The two boasted of their mutual deceptions: people in the bunker thought Müller planned to stay there and commit suicide, while Reitsch intended to conceal a day in her account by saying she had left Berlin with von Greim a day later—if she could keep her story straight. An SS guard called for Müller, who saluted Reitsch, indicating that it was time for her to stand by with the plane's engines running.

After about an hour, Reitsch saw a group walking towards her carrying what could have been a corpse. Müller and his guards escorted the unconscious Hitler onto the plane, along with Braun, Stumpfegger, and Hitler's pilot Hans Baur. Instead of bagged luggage, Baur carefully hauled two paintings, one a portrait of Frederick the Great that Hitler had given him and the other an image of a posh Italian man the *Führer* had hoped to find a suitable home for. Baur eyed Reitsch to make sure she was in solid shape to fly. She showed no sign of hesitation.

As the plane landed, Hitler regained consciousness. He could only communicate with his eyes. He refused cocaine injections, a good sign, but significant attention was still needed. He confirmed that he was looking forward to

landing in Spain and would be relieved when his surgery was complete. Baur welcomed the entourage onto a larger, long-distance aircraft built for the journey, while Reitsch left with von Greim on her small plane.

In the bunker, the secretaries instructed Manziarly to prepare a posthumous meal for Hitler to keep the news of his death from spreading too quickly. However, the word had already been received quite positively, as both smoking and uninhibited drinking were now allowed. The chef made a dispassionate dish of fried eggs and potatoes, since it would only be left for a specter. Her duties now behind her, she sat on a mattress in the conference room and massaged her feet. She cursed as the yarn worked its way loose from one of her mended socks.

Early the next day, May 1, Manziarly broke out with the secretaries. They searched for relief from the Soviets, but there was little outlet possible, and their group slowly broke apart. Still dressed in a *Wehrmacht* jacket, she headed for a bombed-out house to find some fresh clothes. The cook's compatriots watched from a distance as she met a terrible fate. Three Soviet soldiers surrounded her and took her to a dark underpass. She yelled back at the women that they just wanted to see her papers. She didn't want her potential last words to be a cry of disgrace.

In the shadows, Manziarly could see only the soldiers' faces. But they weren't Russian men. They were Germans she knew from the bunker: Linge, Kempka, and Bormann. Could she be hallucinating?

"Thank God it's you," she offered deliriously.

Kempka turned away, remorseful. As Bormann looked on, Linge held a pistol above Manziarly's eyes and squeezed the trigger, expelling gore through the back of her head. The three men took the body and made for the Chancellery, discarding the Soviet gear as they approached. Bormann and Linge dressed the corpse in a suit of Hitler's, cut the hair, and placed a fake mustache. They left the body in one of the garden's dry reflecting ponds, where several others had already been stored.

In northern Germany, Reitsch and von Greim heard the announcement of Hitler's death, which the regime claimed to have occurred that day, May 1, rather than a day earlier, April 30, as most eyewitnesses later maintained. This disinformation aided Reitsch's concealment of the day she had used to return to Berlin and fly Hitler out.

Baur and Stumpfegger returned to Berlin on the evening of May 1 and met Linge in a crypt that the Nazis sometimes used as a prison cell. Baur handed Linge a small parcel, which he opened to reveal Hitler's dental work. The valet

quickly but stealthily made his way to a crater in the Chancellery garden where the decoy bodies had been buried. Two or three boards had been lodged in the soil to provide a hollow. Linge used these to send his payload towards the male's cranium, then tossed the boards.

Baur joined a break-out group with Axmann, Bormann, and Stumpfegger, but became separated. The rest of the group fought its way across a bridge a mile from the Chancellery, where Axmann was injured. He went a different direction from Bormann and Stumpfegger until sighting the Red Army. He tried to rejoin his companions, but found only their bodies, unsure of what had killed them. Axmann evaded capture for several months, during which he used an alias to organize Nazi loyalists in Germany.

Baur, Linge, and Günsche were captured by the Soviets. Berlin formally surrendered on May 2 and the western Allies widely celebrated the fabulous news that Hitler was dead.

HITLER
DEAD
HITLER
DEAD
HITLER
DEAD

PART II
COLD CASE

CHAPTER 3
THE SUB PLOT

In his will, Hitler named former grand admiral of the Navy Karl Dönitz to succeed him as president. After allowing a number of U-boats to be scuttled to avoid Allied capture, on May 5, Dönitz ordered all remaining submarines to return to base. Germany surrendered on May 8, with U-boats still at sea expected to follow suit. However, German forces held out in pockets on the west coast of France until May 11 to protect the departure of two U-boats. Hitler was on board the first, *U-530*, while the second, *U-977*, harbored loot and lagged behind as a decoy.

The Canary Islands, situated off the coast of Northwest Africa, served as a refueling station before the long voyage south of the equator. There, *U-530*'s crew met a friendly

mechanic named Philip Citroën, who explained that he had been stranded there after his sub was scuttled and he refused to surrender. He showed that he knew his way around a U-boat while helping the Germans load supplies. The desperate young captain, Otto Wermuth, asked Citroën if he could speed their journey. The engineer gave an affirmative nod. Below deck, Citroën kept busy and hummed the usual German war tunes, but there was something altogether unfierce about his demeanor.

As hostilities had ended, the submarine jettisoned its deck gun and anti-aircraft ammo to save weight. Also discarded were the ship's log and the crew's identity papers. The five torpedoes in the arsenal were fired off as the sub neared the equator. Citroën slept in the aft torpedo room, allowing for easy motor and engine access. He noticed that Wermuth often took a bunk there. He listened to him mutter about a group of important passengers in the captain's and officer's quarters that forced him to scavenge for places to sleep like a stowaway on his own ship.

As Argentina had recently joined the war against the Axis, the crew would have to surrender if they put in at Buenos Aires. However, the Nazis had paid military forces aligned to nationalist leader Juan Perón to shield their agents. Several shipments of gold, looted from Holocaust victims, were sent to

Perón, whose allies were then rewarded for depositing most of it in Nazi-tied Swiss bank accounts. As the war ended, some funds were funneled to pro-fascist Catholic clergymen and Red Cross officials who created thousands of false identities for fleeing Nazis. The escapees could then blend in with the historical German communities of Argentina.

In the middle of May, *U-530* landed approximately halfway down Argentina's coast. It was the furthest point south that was not designated as a military zone. Most of the crew went ashore to spend a night on land, while a skeleton crew stayed to submerge the sub. Hitler and his guards were the last to surface from the vessel after several extra minutes aboard. The Argentinean police provided the entourage horses, while some local workers transported luggage via pack animal. The caravan trekked for perhaps a mile, when a small lodge came into view.

The interior of the main room was decorated with Nazi fare, including a massive swastika flag. The crew stood at attention as Hitler entered. His guards remained near the entrance. The once-great dictator huffed and wheezed through his elongated jowls. He walked in a slow circle and made brief eye contact with each man as he presented him a morsel of gold. Hitler then raised a newspaper with a front-page announcement of his death,

which was passed around quietly.

As the session concluded, one of the group's Latin American escorts pulled a cigarette from a box of Lucky Strikes. Hitler looked alerted and his guards were suddenly put on edge. The mechanic, Citroën, suggested that they smoke outside, dissolving the tension. Hitler turned his attention to Müller, shaking his hand in an unmistakable farewell.

On the porch, Citroën approached the young Latin American man, who introduced himself as Diego. They sat down on benches covered by handwoven blankets and Citroën lit a cigarette. Speaking low, he revealed that he was Dutch and had been forced to work in Nazi labor camps after the German invasion of the Netherlands. He was released in 1944 but his country was in a hellish state. As the Allies enclosed Germany, Citroën went undercover at the Nazi station in the Canary Islands, deducing that any escaping officials would likely have to refuel there.

Citroën asked Diego if he was an Allied agent, having suspected that his cigarette box was a hidden camera. Diego admitted that this was the case. He smoked as well, keeping up appearances if not feeding any addiction. In case of eavesdroppers, both men periodically piped out a "Heil Hitler" before returning to their hushed exchange. Diego disclosed that he was a member of a special police unit that had

detected Nazi spy networks with FBI support. They had thwarted attacks on Chilean mines and even the Panama Canal. It was dawning on Diego that his current priority was to return with his novel photograph of Hitler, which would regretfully keep him from continuing to personally track the dictator.

Sympathetic to his new friend's sense of urgency, Citroën presented a solution. He had gleaned that additional Nazis could meet up with Argentinean forces at the Buenos Aires Plaza Hotel, which the thankful Diego noted. Citroën, meanwhile, thought he could find safe haven in the US, where he envisioned bringing the story to intelligence agencies and using Hollywood resources to make a special postwar announcement regarding Hitler's survival.

Citroën wrote down an address in the Netherlands where Diego could write to him. The men laid back and pulled up their blankets. Diego was gone within the hour, but as Citroën stirred awake just before dawn, he sensed that he was not alone. He cracked open one eyelid. On the other side of the porch, a woman was cutting Hitler's hair. She cleaned his face with a wet cloth and left him to watch the sunrise. As the light grew, Citroën saw that Hitler was now nearly bald and only a minuscule block of hair remained under his nose.

U-530's original crew reconvened and the sub went north to dispatch Müller to Germany.

Hitler couldn't have allowed such a high-profile disappearance to be traced to his location, but Müller would be free to surrender to the Allies or attempt his own escape. The sub returned to the Canary Islands, where Wermuth made sure that Müller boarded a northbound plane as the U-boat was refueled for its imminent surrender in Buenos Aires.

Onshore, Wermuth was startled but not surprised by the sight of a familiar face. Despite flaunting a well-formed beard, the captain of *U-977*, Heinz Schäffer, was a year younger than the clean-faced Wermuth. Schäffer had been waiting for the other man and was now allowed to continue his own passage south. Wermuth thanked Schäffer for serving as such a loyal decoy and started to walk away. With a sudden burst of inspiration, however, Wermuth spun on his heels and made an unexpected remark.

"You know that none of this is really happening, right?"

Schäffer nodded slowly and responded, "Of course not."

Müller soon surrendered to the United States Army's Counterintelligence Corps (CIC) in Austria, hoping to follow the model set by Operation Paperclip, in which the US absorbed useful Nazi scientists. Müller gained trust by sharing intel against Soviet installations, then

boldly claimed that Hitler had escaped using a body double—while altering several clues to keep the Allies from finding the *Führer*. In exchange for his release, he revealed details of the Nazi escape routes after learning that the CIC only wanted to bolster them for their own use. This was the debut of Operation Ratline, in which the CIC provided anti-Soviet informants safe passage to South America.

Müller settled in Panama City, where he had established a presence under a false name in the early 1940s. As he had left clues of his death in Berlin, he would be in no danger of extradition. He had been rewarded the initial Panama assignment for his acceptance of a promotion to Gestapo director, a role in which he oversaw the extermination of millions of Jews. Less fortunate officers were prosecuted for their participation in the Holocaust, while others evaded justice using the looted wealth. Hearing of Müller's success, captured Holocaust torture expert Klaus Barbie provided the CIC intelligence in exchange for helping him flee to Bolivia.

CHAPTER 4
RUSSIAN STALL

Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union and its Communist Party, reviewed a film of his army's findings at the Reich Chancellery. The unmistakable remains of Goebbels and those of his deceased wife and six children evidenced the Third Reich's self-destruction. Another body, it seemed, was a decoy made up to look like Hitler. Several news outlets claimed that this was the dictator's corpse, but it was debunked by the Soviet military. The body was a facial mismatch for Hitler and, oddly for someone of his importance, wearing mended socks.

A chauffeur was quoted as saying the body was a cook's, providing Hitler time to escape. A report from Stockholm—issued days before Berlin fell—predicted that the dictator

would use such a method. Stalin, aware of the constant threat of espionage, suspected that a Nazi defector had leaked the intel.

The day after the double's dismissal, other remains were exhumed, thought to belong to Hitler and Eva Braun. Both tested positive for poison and showed no evidence of a gunshot. The bodies had been burned beyond recognition but were accompanied by dental bridges, albeit being found loose.

Two colleagues of Hitler and Braun's dentist were brought to the autopsy site to identify the dental work. Hitler's was highly unique, having accumulated conspicuous gold bridges and plating over the last couple of years. A maxillary bridge, comprising most of his upper teeth, was made almost entirely of metal. Meanwhile, a lower jawbone fragment, broken off just around the roots of the teeth, consisted of a complex combination of real and artificial elements. The bone fragment was intact, with only superficial burning.

Meanwhile, the metallic bridge found on the woman's corpse was identified as having been created for Braun, but her retreat to the bunker had permanently delayed appointments to have it installed. The suspicious Soviets kept the two dental experts in custody.

Stalin was convinced that his old rival had survived. The Nazi eyewitnesses were ruthlessly pressured to admit that a double had

been used to help Hitler make a last-minute escape by air. Baur was accused of returning to Berlin to murder witnesses of his departure. Günsche initially stated that he had not seen Hitler's body until it had been wrapped in a blanket, then elaborated that Linge told him that the cause of death was a gunshot. Günsche also suggested that a body double could have been stowed in the bunker.

At a press conference in June 1945, Soviet officials first announced that Hitler and Braun had married, while presenting their conclusion that the dictator had escaped. Marshal Zhukov stated that "We have found no corpse that could be Hitler's." Within weeks, *Time* magazine accused the Nazis of sharing false news of Hitler's death. At the Potsdam meeting in July, Stalin said Hitler had most likely fled to Spain or Argentina. This embarrassed President Truman, who had on May 2 (prior to the Soviet probe) claimed that an anonymous source of "the best authority" confirmed that Hitler was certainly dead. In fact, this information came from the Germans.

In July, Lieutenant John F. Kennedy and the secretary of the Navy arrived in Berlin, taking time to visit the *Führerbunker*. Kennedy wrote in his journal that, despite his menace, Hitler was amongst "the most significant figures who ever lived" and had "a mystery about him in the way he lived and in the manner of his

death that will live and grow after him".

Using his companion's FBI connections, Kennedy sent a postcard that he was ensured would be shown to the bureau's director, John Edgar Hoover. Having spent some time in the Big Apple, he wrote, "I'll bet a dollar to a doughnut that Hitler is located right in New York City! There's no other city in the world where he could so easily be absorbed." In October, General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower stated that he believed Hitler was probably dead but agreed with his chief of staff that there was no proof, as the Soviets had presented none.

After the US's defeat of Japan, proving the terrible power of nuclear weaponry (developed with the goal of beating Hitler to the punch), Stalin returned to his inquiry of Hitler's fate. With so many cards in his hands, he thought he could entice the West to join his scrutiny of the remains so they could work together to capture Hitler, hopefully leading to a lasting peace.

Although the brain of the inspected body had been intact, the back of the skull was missing. Recalling that Linge had said Hitler died by a gunshot to the temple, Stalin ordered the exhumation of the body double with the darned socks. The corpse—a woman's—had an entry wound above the eyes and an exit wound through the back of the cranium, as from an execution. Stalin requested a skull fragment,

which as the only evidence of an exit wound, would showcase the trajectory of the magic bullet, ostensibly able to turn a right angle without causing brain damage.

In December 1945, Stalin invited one representative each from the US, the UK, and France to a Soviet-led dig of the bunker grounds. The soil was sifted where Hitler's men said they buried his body. The ground was excavated to the depth of the bunker roof, eliminating any potentially hidden clues. The only trinkets trumped up were one of Hitler's uniform caps and a pair of panties with Braun's initials.

The US intelligence officer protested that he could see no evidence of bodies having been burned. The Frenchman suggested that Hitler's corpse might have been burned to ashes, with subsequent rains washing the remains away. The Brit opined that this was very unlikely, as even indoor cremations leave behind bones, which are then usually pulverized. The next morning, the Soviets alleged that their Western guests had improperly removed documents from the bunker, providing them a pretext to dismiss them.

Stalin initiated a second investigation, tellingly codenamed "Operation Myth". The skull fragment was allegedly found in the crater where Hitler's remains were interred, despite having just been thoroughly sifted in the last

few weeks. Additionally, a Soviet forensicist found traces of blood in some corridors in the bunker and blood spurts on the wall of the emergency exit stairwell. The expert concluded that Hitler's men had unintentionally dragged his blanketed body on and off the wall in a heartbeat rhythm.

The eyewitnesses were reexamined for the production of a book of final testimony. Linge, Günsche, and Baur were brought together. When they seemed to be alone, Baur reminded the other men, "We must never say what really happened!" Baur was quickly removed from the project as he never claimed to observe the alleged bodies. Günsche tried to dictate what both he and Linge should say and threatened to betray the latter if he did not cooperate, although there was no time for them to achieve cohesion.

Linge and Günsche were increasingly subjected to worse conditions, with their captors claiming they would rape and kill members of their families. The Soviets provided an illusory respite by sending in one of their own, undercover as a German soldier, to bunk with Linge. He accepted the bait, hungry for a morsel of camaraderie. Linge declared that he would not crack to the Soviets, as he was privy to many details revealing the true story. For instance, he had seen the purported entry wound on Hitler's temple from a light-reflecting

angle. It was therapeutic to finally complain about how unprofessional he thought it looked, with the blood just painted on.

After Winston Churchill labeled the Soviet border an “iron curtain” and the US accused Stalin of weaponizing Hitler’s ghost to motivate his “totalitarian” forces against the West, the stubborn Russian leader closed the Hitler file for the remainder of his days, recommending that his successor not declassify any relevant documents for ten years after his death.

CHAPTER 5
CHILEAN FIVE-O

For months after the war ended in Europe, Chilean investigator Diego Martínez was met with disbelief while arguing that his account and photo proved Hitler escaped to Argentina. He was allowed to make a final outing to follow his lead in Buenos Aires. Martínez visited the Argentine state bank, where the Nazis had headquartered during the war, but there was no sign of continued activity. His deputy officers monitored the Buenos Aires Plaza Hotel, which Citroën had identified as an Axis outpost.

It was not long before the vice president, Juan Perón, was sighted amongst a cabal of uniformed German émigrés, but Martínez's colleagues were unable to follow his trail. They never saw him leave the hotel.

The disappearing act sent the shrewd Martínez searching through public records on the building, only a couple of decades old. He noticed an annex that externally looked like a separate property, but was connected by a foundation that could perhaps be traversed. Martínez joined the stakeout and watched this back door, with a car waiting nearby. If he could manage it, he was going to have Perón deliver him to Hitler's hideout.

Martínez smilingly intercepted Perón as he tried to use his secret exit. Benito, a police photographer, captured the moment using the camera disguised as a pack of smokes. The undercover men signaled fascist sympathies. Perón agreed to deliver Martínez to a Nazi-linked outpost outside the city. Benito left to deliver his prints to Santiago.

Perón directed the Chileans to a barn in the country, where they found the Nazi recruiter, then returned to Buenos Aires with one less man. Martínez was driven for hours and finally dropped off outside the city of Bariloche. He was allowed into a military commons. Guards implied that he should stay put. Then he recognized one of the Nazis from Hitler's U-boat landing. After a few words were exchanged, a meal was brought to him, and there suddenly seemed to be little difference amongst the men. A uniformed man pointed out a bin where he could return his dishes.

By Martínez's count, the colony could not have consisted of more than a hundred individuals. He was seen as one of their Latin American hosts hired to perform mundane work, but was not expected to participate in military routines. He noticed two flags in the courtyard, one flaunting the Nazi swastika and the other a crowned, phoenixlike bird shielded by the red, white, and blue. Hitler and Braun were said to be housed in a nearby lake mansion, with the Nazi outpost serving as a training center for guards to continually man a number of defensive lookouts.

Hitler appeared at assemblies. His hair and mustache were reduced to a minimal display, which along with some weight loss made him quite unrecognizable. Martínez stole a snapshot with a camera styled as a pocket watch, an adaptation after his discovery that Hitler was put off by the mere appearance of cigarettes. The dictator-in-exile maintained a surprising degree of strength, but remained mute. A spokesman conveyed sermons on his behalf, framing the *Führer*'s oral ulcers as stigmata of his passion for the Nazi cause. Martínez often noticed a rather reluctant child standing by in Hitler's presence. Could this be a potential heir?

In 1946, Perón was elected president of Argentina. The Nazis regarded this as the expected outcome of their endorsement of his

campaign. For Martínez, the next four years passed under the iron rule of routine as he waited for clues of Hitler's plans and a chance to collect evidence.

As the next election neared, a huge assembly was hosted inside a hangar, where the Nazis were instructed to ensure Perón's reelection. Martínez photographed the event from the front of the arena, holding his pocket watch with the expression of someone on a tight schedule. Hitler leaned forward in his front-row seat, flanked by guards. Known to few, his closest allies were seated behind him. The brown-haired Braun was accompanied by her children, the eldest now a teenager.

A meet-and-greet was held for the top pro-fascist campaign donors. Hitler saluted a small audience, joined by Perón. Up close, Martínez could see that Hitler had now had dentures implanted, causing some swelling. His mustache was no larger than a cigarette butt. Perón also donned a disguise, featuring an uncharacteristic mustache and an obtrusive menagerie of metals. Martínez captured yet another incriminating photo.

Then the fugitive Hitler migrated to a compound in Paraguay. Having apparently served its purpose, the former Nazi colony was slowly dismantled. The few remaining men

served themselves, allowing Martínez to quietly depart and hitchhike to Santiago.

The investigator developed his photos and waited to add them to the archives until late at night, when his unit, Department 50 (named for its telephone extension), was typically vacant. He wasn't prepared to explain his whereabouts to his colleagues, who didn't even know he was still alive. Nonetheless, he ran into Benito, who was unperturbed when Martínez whispered that Hitler had headed to Paraguay.

Martínez omitted any written report, fearing that controversial evidence might be thrown out by federal bureaucrats in the wake of Chile's presidential alignment to the Red Scare against communism. He misdated his photos to 1937, when Nazi spy networks were first definitely operating in Chile, though the police unit only formed in 1941 and it was now 1950. Martínez envisaged the discordant chronology as alerting only the inquisitive investigator. On his way out, he retrieved contact information for the unit's former FBI support.

Having been unable to pay rent for years, Martínez knew he would return to Santiago as a vagrant. He headed out to his family's old neighborhood, looking forward to seeing faces he had feared he may never see again. He also planned to write Citroën about his findings.

Martínez passed an alley and heard a

sharp sound. As he glanced around for its source, his heart began to beat faster and pain surged within.

“Deserter,” a suited man with a biting German accent said before spitting on the ground and walking away.

The lightheaded Diego collapsed to his knees. As he died, he realized that he would neither be able to reunite with his family nor spread word of the Fourth Reich.

PART III
THE GRAND RESURRECTION

CHAPTER 6
HOW I MET YOUR FÜHRER

One evening in the autumn of 1929, Heinrich Hoffman, the official photographer of the Nazi Party, invited his relatively new employee, the 17-year-old Eva Braun, to stay for dinner. He introduced her to his middle-aged friend, *Herr* ('Mister') *Wolf*. Hoffman showed his friend a picture he had taken in Munich in 1914 of the announcement of the Great War. The man proudly said he had attended the event. Braun felt as though she was meant to be impressed, but remained unfazed.

Hoffmann drank until he was tired. *Herr Wolf* offered Braun a ride home in his Mercedes, which she politely declined. As the man drove away, Braun's companion asked her if she had recognized Adolf Hitler.

“That man cannot have been Hitler,” she replied.

Another day, Hoffman showed Braun a large print of the Munich announcement. He placed a small cutout of a young Hitler’s face and said, “See the mustache? Very ahead of its time.” Hoffman knew that Hitler had not actually branded himself with the Chaplin style until the early 1920s, when he took control of the Nazi Party. The photographer snapped a shot of the new layout and asked Braun to develop it, advising her to keep the alteration a secret.

A few weeks later, the New York stock market crashed, crippling German loans and causing increased unemployment. Braun’s sister Gretl found work at Hoffmann’s studio in 1931. Though Gretl was impressed that Braun had met Hitler, Eva clarified that he was reputedly more interested in his half-niece, Geli Raubal. Hoffmann had even once disclosed that Hitler had tried to seduce his daughter, two years younger than Braun, who at 19 was beginning to feel like old news.

Braun was increasingly tasked with designing antisemitic propaganda. Hitler’s racism was disturbing, but Braun felt that she was simply doing her job in a difficult economy. In September, word spread that Raubal had committed suicide with Hitler’s pistol. Braun began to be courted by the liberated party

leader. She entertained his calls, but ensured that she continued to speak her own mind.

During one encounter, Braun raised her conjecture that German antisemitism mirrored Christianity, due to that religion revering one Jew while condemning all non-converts. After a prolonged silence, Hitler admitted that he disliked the church's grip over the views of his countrymen—being a fault of Western culture writ large. It was Rome's militant ideology that he wanted to revive, with Caesar the true Christ. Braun looked betrayed.

"*Et tu*, Judas?" she quipped. Then the pair found themselves laughing.

Hitler was defeated in the presidential election of 1932, sending him into a period of isolated contemplation. The lonely Braun took a lead from Raubal and shot herself in the chest, signaling that her heart was worth nothing to herself. The two consummated their love by the end of the year.

In January 1933, Hitler was appointed chancellor, owing to his party's dominance in the Reichstag, the parliament of Germany. A communist was soon implicated in setting fire to the Reichstag building, fueling the passage of laws letting Hitler override civil liberties. He ordered the construction of the regime's first concentration camp to confine his political enemies, especially communists.

Upon President Hindenburg's death in

1934, Hitler consolidated their positions and declared himself *Führer* of Germany. Hitler provided Braun, now a party photographer, a residence in Munich.

Due to her lover's increased notoriety, Braun contemplated the remote possibility of his exile. Hitler was too busy to discuss it, but one day Gestapo chief Heinrich Müller, a police inspector in the SS, offered Braun his advice. He suggested that it was never too early to make an escape plan. Papers could be forged under a false name, but the foolproof ticket was identity theft outright.

"You see, I'm from Missouri," Müller said in an American Midwest accent as he slid on a pair of horn-rimmed glasses.

Braun started receiving news clippings about a fresh New York upstart who had not had any portraits published. She found great symbolic meaning in the man's name. Müller received her authority as the *Führer*'s protector to begin laying the escape route. Her order authorized Western Nazi agents to murder and impersonate the man in financial, legal, and personal affairs. Müller's group went on to displace a Scottish immigrant to the US for Braun's use. In early 1936, the two identities were married, with Nazi agents standing in at the ceremony. A month later, Braun appeared near Hitler at the Berlin Winter Olympics, separated by a few rows.

The couple conceived their first child that summer. Braun used her new identity to visit New York, where she gave birth to a daughter in early 1937. Although she was documented as living with her husband in his mother's house, she kept a distance from the stranger, who was confined and even sedated when necessary. In 1938, Hitler's first son was born against the backdrop of Germany's annexations of Austria and part of Czechoslovakia.

Braun returned her hair to its natural dark brown hue for heavily made-up family portrait photos. Meanwhile, she mined the pro-Nazi German American Bund for a man with suitable features to help create Hitler's fake portraits. These would be published to establish his US presence and counter any suspicions of murder.

Braun shaped the male's contours with her rusty painting hand, approximating the correct perspective. As time passed, aging would obscure continuity errors, offset by superficial details like hair. Braun included a toothbrush mustache, finding that Chaplin was still popular while going to movies to learn the local language. The style had of course been abruptly canceled, but after the first false portrait was printed in 1940, the partisan Braun elected to double down on it.

CHAPTER 7
WITNESSES FOR THE PROSECUTION

After his escape from Argentina in 1945, the Dutch amateur spy Philip Citroën made it to Los Angeles, where he approached an FBI field office with a lead about a high-ranking Nazi in exile. When he specified that he meant Hitler, he was told that an abundance of rumors and tabloid claims had made any story he might tell fairly unexceptional. However, he was directed to a reporter for the *Los Angeles Examiner* willing to hear his account in exchange for buying him lunch. This sparked a series of meetings at the Melody Lane restaurant on Hollywood and Vine, which Citroën entertained on the seemingly improbable hope that the FBI could be using the mode of interaction to screen out likely quacks.

Citroën detailed Hitler's arrival in Buenos Aires and said he could share the location where someone could be transported to his hideout, but only if he was taken seriously and protected from retribution. He did not reveal his role as a U-boat mechanic, not wishing to unduly implicate himself as a collaborator. When he was confident that the journalist would deliver his tale and address to the FBI, regardless of the bureau's potential disinterest, he stopped going to the restaurant.

As he had planned, Citroën went on to court the cinematic wizards of Hollywood. He approached Orson Welles' office, but was told that the director was only pursuing "serious films". He learned, however, that Alfred Hitchcock was interested in a project about Hitler's death based on testimony from Nazi eyewitnesses at the Nuremberg trials. Citroën was allowed to make an elevator pitch, but the Master of Suspense indicated only indecision as he would now have to choose between two depictions. Hitch mentioned that he was about to make a courtroom drama with Gregory Peck and would think on it. Finally, Citroën pitched Sidney Lumet the idea of a jury having to decide how a dictator disappeared, with a single jurist's defense of his implausible escape making the other eleven as mad as him.

Before leaving L.A., Citroën received a mysterious letter at his hotel. He was astonished

to realize that it was from the FBI and indicated that J. Edgar Hoover had found his account extremely interesting, owing to the director's own knowledge of the Nazi spy networks in Argentina. Through the L.A. field office, Citroën received the witness protection he had asked for in the form of a deceased FBI agent's identity, providing him a career should he choose to pursue it. Meanwhile, Hoover relayed that the Chilean government was already investigating Hitler from Buenos Aires—apparently, Citroën realized, based on the lead he had provided his friend Diego.

Citroën spent the next five years working for the FBI in Seattle, Washington. His resources within the bureau gave him a sharp awareness of whether he needed to keep a low profile due to potential neo-Nazi threats, which was rarely the case. He was allowed to make frequent contact with his family, including periodic visits to Europe, but had to risk traveling under his real name to keep his protected identity secret.

Citroën practiced his German and Spanish should his anti-fascist adventures continue. Indeed, one day, he received a letter from Chilean police photographer Benito, whom Diego had instructed to contact Citroën in case of emergency. Sadly, Diego had been killed by an unknown assailant, but informed Benito that Hitler was headed for southern Paraguay. Citroën considered it certain that only he could

finish what he and his friend had started.

Not wanting to waste a moment, Citroën followed Hoover's advice not to wait for an official assignment and simply informed his Seattle office that he would not return until he had finished attending to an important matter. Citroën packed his gear and headed to southern Paraguay, where he found a vacant compound near Colonia Independencia, a former Nazi hideout. A local claimed that the installation was associated with Hitler, whom he had seen wearing a full mustache. The Nazi leader was said to have flown north to Bolivia, where Citroën traveled next.

In Bolivia, Citroën learned of a makeshift base where the Nazis had practiced English and calculated further border crossings. Whether by land, sea, or sky, Citroën deduced that the next likely move would be to Colombia, neighboring Panama. Crossing the canal would pose no problem with convincing identity documents. Hitler could simply enter the US as a returning traveler. The country was wary of communists, not German war criminals.

Citroën relocated to Venezuela and established himself as a freight operator in Colombia, where he oversaw deliveries to German clients. He noticed imports to the central city of Tunja and was led to the historical "colonial residence" of the city's conquistador founder. By 1953, he began

visiting the Nazi occupants on inventory-aligned intervals. He observed construction, learning that some modifications had been made to increase Hitler's potential escape paths.

Before very long, Citroën was allowed to stay during hours of recreation. After so much work, it felt like a meek reward when he saw Hitler strolling around the building with his guards. The ex-dictator wore a false mustache and his teeth were pearl white, obviously having had dentures fitted. His jowls sagged in a excess of flesh compared to his public image. Citroën learned Hitler's preferred walking routes and slowly positioned himself more prominently within his view, allowing himself to be recognized.

In early 1954, Citroën was informed that Hitler was hosting a small gathering of officers and VIPs on his next visit. Citroën was invited but not required to come. He inspected the patio room where this was to occur and placed a hidden camera near a pair of chairs. A timer would run for five minutes after its activation.

The event arrived two weeks later, but the wait felt much longer to Citroën. The patio was full of officers, some of their wives, and financial supporters based on their coats and furs despite the tropical climate. Citroën made sure that his camera hadn't been discovered. He paced around, but hovered around the two chairs. When Hitler made his rounds, Citroën

promptly offered him a chance to relax for a few minutes while they reminisced. Citroën poured himself a glass of water, looked at his watch, and stealthily set the timer. Hitler did not indicate that he was thirsty, so the two finally sat together.

Citroën confirmed that he was part of the U-boat crew that had transported Hitler across the Atlantic. Hitler nodded with a smile of gratitude, signaling that he was willing to continue talking. Whenever he hinted at his departure to another area of the patio, Citroën delayed him with hollow praise of his ideology, reign over Germany, and endurance in his state of exile. With seconds remaining, Citroën looked over at a Nazi flag hung above the patio and commended Hitler's brilliant design. Hitler gazed at it as his patience dissipated. The camera snapped a clearly identifiable three-quarter view of the villain. Citroën didn't move for several seconds, then stood at exactly the same time as Hitler, who quickly vanished.

In Venezuela, Citroën developed two quality prints, using straight edges to crop distinct compositions. He took a short break, sure that he had stored the negative properly, but upon returning to his closet darkroom, found that further prints were useless. After all this time and effort, he was limited to two original copies. Without disclosing his FBI alter ego, he brought one print to a local CIA station,

along with the spoiled negative. A lone sympathetic agent named Juan took notes and offered his phone number if Citroën wanted to share additional evidence. He left feeling that his report was going to be ignored.

Citroën kept making his deliveries to Tunja until January 1955, when Hitler left Colombia. He was reputedly returning to Argentina, but Citroën suspected otherwise. Back in Venezuela, he contacted Juan, who was no longer with the agency but was willing to help file a report. Juan crafted an angle to garner attention with the agency: Citroën had not gone undercover but was ex-SS and instead of providing the photo, Juan had to copy it without his knowledge. The report compelled both CIA stations to acknowledge that they had been contacted. The head of the agency's Western Hemisphere Division shot down a potentially far-reaching and expensive probe, but suggested informing the FBI.

Already reporting directly to Hoover, Citroën documented the room where he had allegedly photographed himself with Hitler. He brought his family on an outing, showing them the patio where, he told them, he had last encountered a famous acquaintance. He took a picture showing the chairs in the corner, with his family in the foreground for reference. He sent this back to Hoover, along with a photocopy of the other uniquely cropped print, affirming

the negative's existence.

In Allied-occupied western Germany, a court had been reviewing proof of Hitler's death since 1948, when returning his plundered assets had hit a legal snag due to the lack of an official declaration of death.

The court cited Axmann and Kempka's testimony at Nuremberg that they had seen Hitler's body being carried in a blanket as insufficient evidence. The two had made several suspicious statements. Axmann asserted that Hitler had shot himself through the mouth (as Günsche told him), supposedly rupturing his temples from within and separating his dental work, although no Soviet forensics had been released to necessitate the latter assumption.

Kempka, meanwhile, reasoned that the fire and Soviet shelling would probably have destroyed the bodies, except for bone fragments and teeth. Further, he contended that he had mended a pair of Hitler's socks in the bunker, a convenient explanation for the reported Soviet dismissal of an intact Hitler candidate as a body double. In 1952, a US court in Germany began to collect new interviews, including from Linge and Günsche following their release from Soviet prison in 1955.

Günsche denied that he told Axmann that Hitler shot himself through the mouth, but

Kempka and two of Hitler's secretaries had made similar claims. English historian Hugh Trevor-Roper only mentioned an oral gunshot in his influential 1946 report. Linge, however, told the Western court that he saw a coin-sized entry wound to Hitler's temple. Günsche said Hitler's face was covered in blood, contradicting his claim to the Soviets that he did not look at the bodies. He also claimed that Hitler's body was seated in an armchair, differing from others' memories and photographs of a sofa bloodstain supporting his location there.

Linge asserted that the Soviets never found Hitler's body, despite an eyewitness directing them to the supposed burial site, which two others confirmed to the court. Linge struggled to explain his logic, stating, "I know that because—uh... he uh, they never—they questioned me repeatedly about it."

Problematically, the eyewitnesses did not report seeing an exit wound, a bullet shell, or a hole in the wall. The court arranged a ballistics test to determine if the bullet was more likely to have exited the skull or become fragmented or lodged inside it. Although it was known from past studies that a shot of the reported caliber fired at point-blank range would pass through both temples, it provided the experts a visceral shock when the bullet pierced the cadaver's head and continued deep into the safety wall.

The photographs from the bunker study

did not show any blood from the expected exit wound. In 1945, Hitler's bed frame had been found bloodstained, with the mattress missing. Burnt and destroyed furniture was found in the meeting room, but no bloodstains were visible. A British officer suggested that a different operation could have taken place in Hitler's bedroom. The court admitted that Hitler's blood could have been poured onto the sofa to deceive, as the existence of unique hereditary genes had long been understood. Since 1945, DNA had only been identified as their carrier.

Although Western agencies had been sent too many reports of unverified Hitler sightings to count, a CIA official was called to testify that the agency recently received a purported photograph of the ex-dictator in Colombia. Upstart FBI official Mark Felt supported the sighting as reliable, noting that a report from Tunja described Hitler parading the streets in a trench coat after dark.

The experts privately conceded that Hitler had likely survived, but was of little risk, probably simply living out his twilight years disguised as a South American. The judge issued a death certificate in February 1956, ruled as a presumption of death because no reliable eyewitnesses had provably seen the body. The investigators lauded the outcome as kickstarting a legal process for returning Nazi-looted assets, whatever might have become of the chief thief.

CHAPTER 8
THE ABOMINABLE SHOWMEN

In Zürich, Switzerland, Hitler exited Credit Suisse's headquarters with a heavy suitcase and took a cab to the airport. He sported a false beard, bushy eyebrows, and wireframe glasses. He was an old student of American mannerisms and had built up a vocabulary of useful English phrases. If he were to tell someone on his first-class flight to New York that he was Hitler, they would have burst out laughing, considering the kooky old man a riot.

Hitler had spent the last few months relaxing in Central America and Mexico, at some point feeling the healthiest he had in his entire life. With years of press having literally showboated his new identity prior to his arrival in the US, he entered the role of an aggressive

businessman who had profited off the troops.

Hitler strategically made his public debut at the cornerstone laying of a synagogue he had helped finance. The rabbi presented Hitler an appreciation plaque at the dedication ceremony, where he was sure to strike certain poses to cast a Sinatra-esque charm. Braun helped answer more complex queries with her well-practiced English. Despite their Jewish ties, the couple was Lutheran, supporting the Reformation against Catholicism (as well as the German namesake's vehement antisemitism).

Since the 1940s, Hitler's secret circle had employed a Minnesota man who happened to have the same first and last name as Hitler's persona. The Minnesotan was first employed as a stand-in, with his authentic identification being convincing enough in most cases, never mind the middle name. Then, under Nazi guidance, he corresponded with Vice President Richard Nixon, for example advising him not to refer to his opponent in the 1960 presidential election by name. The Minnesota man followed an intermediary's instructions to make copies of his letters, as well as their replies.

Meanwhile, following some misbehavior, Hitler sent his second-eldest son to a military school for the duration of his teenage years. He became an apt pupil. As his 1964 graduation neared, Hitler arranged a rite of passage for his heir apparent. He had a Nazi sympathizer coach

a Soviet-tied rifleman, who was hired to shoot President John F. Kennedy during a reelection campaign stunt in Dallas, Texas. The would-be defector took the fall as the lone gunman, but in reality he was the second shooter.

In 1964, Hitler wrote of his “continued successes” in a letter to Nixon, mimicking the Minnesotan’s handwriting. He suggested that Nixon, who had retired from politics after losing to JFK, return in 1968, considering the curse that seemed to be on his enemies. Nixon tossed the letter into his fireplace, but the seed had been firmly planted.

In 1968, the Soviets quite unexpectedly shared Hitler’s alleged autopsy report. It was dismissed by Western historians as a revival of Stalinist propaganda, holding that only the dictator’s dental remains had ever been found. In fact, this had been the original source of Stalin’s doubts. The book novelly published photographs confirming that the jawbone fragment was limited to the tooth area, broken and burnt around the edges. Further, the author opined that if Hitler died by gunshot, it must have been an execution, which Linge tearfully agreed that he had delivered.

With his preferred candidate in office, Hitler passed the operations of his business to his favorite son, while Hitler used his open line of communication to continue influencing the president. As a result, Nixon commonly opposed

his own Republican Party, for instance pulling out of Vietnam. The ability to manipulate both parties was tantamount to control of a nuclear power and could be extended to manipulate the Western Bloc in the Cold War. With the whole world in his hands, the devil could announce his second coming. Kennedy's murder would be framed as the elimination of an opponent of unification, as he had stated that the US would not prevent the Soviets from constructing the Berlin Wall.

During his 1972 reelection campaign, Nixon authorized operatives to infiltrate the Democratic National Committee. A federal source exposed the president's involvement, and facing impeachment, Nixon resigned in 1974. The deep-background status of the federal informant (meaning he couldn't be named) inspired the moniker "Deep Throat". This was suspected to be the FBI's de facto leader, Mark Felt, although he denied the assertion. Felt had advanced to the post of deputy director after Hoover's death in early 1972. When Nixon's appointee to lead the bureau took sick leave, Felt had become the FBI's top man.

However, Mark Felt wasn't the man's true name. Hoover had bestowed the false identity upon Philip Citroën to protect him after providing his intel on Hitler. His once-baldish hair had grown fuller than it ever had during his stressful young adulthood. He was well-

supported as he elevated through the upper ranks, eventually becoming third in command after Hoover and his deputy.

Following the Kennedy assassination, “Felt” probed Nixon’s unlikely involvement. He discovered his correspondence with the man from Minnesota, who had separately boasted of his relation to the New York businessman. Felt’s team scoured the regional newspaper archives. He found the smoking gun of Hitler’s escape to the US in Brooklyn editions dating from 1940 to 1950. The earliest portrait was a laughable composite, with the later likenesses also reading as inconsistent. The Chaplin mustache seemed to be an untimely goof as well. Further, Felt learned that Hitler had children, leading him to suggest that his Watergate codename be a lewd allusion to the reproductive act.

The Justice Department had already been investigating Hitler and his heir for practicing racial profiling. Felt shared FBI resources to support the inquiry. After their case was proven, a settlement ordered the business to comply with the Civil Rights Act and implement a variety of reparations. Nevertheless, the company’s chief executive officer asserted that his side had won, boasting that he had not been required to accept “persons on welfare”—which wasn’t the point of the case.

With their racist policies a matter of public record, endorsement for the dynasty

could not be excused simply because Hitler changed his name. The skeletons in the family closet were not issued in shades of grey. To various ideologies, they must be categorized as totally damning, forgivable... or worth praise.

Hitler's heir occupied the top three floors of his Manhattan tower, opened in the 1980s to serve as the new company headquarters. The top floor was labeled the 66th although the building was ten stories shorter. In April 1989, he received a call in his office, located on a lower floor, and was surprised to hear his father's voice. He had dropped in to see an apartment that his son had long been reserving for him. The executive took his private elevator up to his father's floor, one story below his own residence.

The frail Hitler was accompanied by his wife, who had exuberantly returned to a blonde hairstyle. Hitler congratulated his son on the tower but said he didn't want to live there. Although he claimed that he didn't want to unduly take credit for the building, he actually saw skyscrapers as a trap and refused to reside atop such a high castle.

Before his son's arrival, he had hung Raphael's *Portrait of a Young Man*, the most valuable painting stolen by the Nazis during the war. The elder man suggested that it would make a wonderful private viewing room.

“Wow, dad, this looks really old. I can’t believe you have this.”

“That’s right, I do… You know what? Today’s my 100th birthday.”

His son was briefly taken aback, then replied, “Oh, really? I didn’t bring you a present.”

His father glanced outside, taking in the panoramic view of New York City. He observed, “This is fine. This is good. But today, I’m giving the gifts.” He slid a book across the coffee table, the cover reading *Hitler’s Table Talk*. “I want you to know what made me tick when I was young.”

His son picked up the book and flipped through the pages. “This looks interesting,” he said. “You read this?”

“No, actually I dictated it.” There was a moment of silence.

His son finally nodded, remembering suppressed memories of a family trip to the secret Nazi cell in Argentina. Somehow, he had always known about his father, who had been absent for his first ten years. And who else would have let him shoot JFK for a graduation present?

Hitler continued, “You don’t have to read the whole thing. But I just wanted to tell you some things. You must remember your German heritage, but never mention the word Nazi or the name… Hitler. Keep Israel closer than your

Western allies."

The executive watched the sun set behind his father, a disarming trick the elder man had shown him. Hitler's son could see a cave in one side of his father's jawbone, having deformed over the years due to its fragmentary nature. In this moment, everything his father was saying made sense to him. His mother looked on from a side chair.

Hitler leaned forward. "You're a king. A killer, but a king. Act as you want, but don't get caught misbehaving. The voters are always watching."

"OK. Thanks, dad. Goodnight, mom," the CEO exhorted after a long silence. The cloudy sky glowed orange.

"It's good to see you," his mother crooned. The executive saw himself out.

"Bringing him up, it hasn't all been for naught," the woman reflected.

"He's a good boy," the old man said.

Seeking a clearer perspective of her husband's thoughts, the woman asked, "But is he electable?"

"Well, certainly not as a Democrat," he quipped, leading the couple to enjoy one of their timeless bouts of maniacal laughter.

EPILOGUE
THE COMMONPLACE KING

After moving to New York City in the early 1960s, bohemian folk singer Bob Dylan sought out one of his main influences, Woody Guthrie. The two formed a friendship, often going into deep conversations over cannabis or tobacco cigarettes. They shared a strong distaste for the establishment. On one occasion, Guthrie sang about a racist landlord of an apartment he had rented in the 1950s, leading him to pontificate that Hitler had reincarnated in New York.

When the Beatles were in the city in August 1964, Dylan thought it would be worth going to their hotel to meet them. He wasn't their biggest fan, but had misheard some of their lyrics as being marijuana-friendly. Upon realizingly his mistake... he felt that he should

provide an appropriate warning before sharing a joint. He cautioned that you had to take a total of 420 hits before smoking pot would send you to hell, alluding to Hitler's birthday.

John Lennon opined in an interview for a London newspaper that rock music had grown more popular than Jesus, causing outrage in the US after this was republished in a domestic teen magazine. An LSD-inspired Paul McCartney later composed the nonconformist masterwork *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Each band member selected people they wanted to see on the cover. The King of Rock 'n' Roll, Elvis Presley, was deemed too important to depict amongst the expansive crowd. The American market doomed Lennon's request to include Jesus, but his request for Hitler resulted in the printing of a cutout—tossed aside before final photography.

Always mischievous, Lennon created an endearing mystery by sticking another figure behind the waxworks of the Beatles and telling several people that the cover showed Hitler behind the band. The mystery man was simply a young Chaplin without his mustache. Later in the year, the sleeve from the band's *Magical Mystery Tour* depicted the canceled facial hair.

The Who parodied the mustache and Nazi uniforms, while Pete Townshend sang about what it might be like to be a villain "Behind Blue Eyes". David Bowie presented a double message

by proclaiming that a starman wanted to meet the public but was afraid he'd blow their minds and thus opted to gradually reveal his presence using television. Organized-religion critic Bob Marley declared that God was a living man. Meanwhile, *Jesus Christ Superstar* depicted the messiah from a modern viewpoint.

The concept of a Hitler comeback had entered the literary fray by the late 1960s, frequently followed by movie adaptations, in addition to original films. Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* focuses on a New York mob boss's formative transition of power to his heir. The author of *Rosemary's Baby*, concerning the New York birth of Satan's son, later wrote *The Boys from Brazil*, in which ratline escapee Josef Mengele (played by Gregory Peck in the movie) cultivates young Hitler clones, some in the US. Stephen King's *The Dead Zone* compares a fight against a corrupt politician—who will start nuclear winter if elected president—to going back in time to stop Hitler.

The evil Empire from *Star Wars* openly caricatures the Nazis. The antagonist, modeled on Hitler, was reserved a supernatural ability to somehow return. The protagonist believes that his father was killed by Darth Vader, whose name resembles *vater* (German for 'father'), but when his true paternal origin is revealed, he begins to be tempted by the dark side.

What is the antichrist without his opposite? Joseph Jackson was a strict father, forming his kids into the commercially successful Jackson 5, but Michael often felt more connected to his fans than his own kin. His hit “Billie Jean” and the accompanying moonwalk launched him to the highest worldwide popularity of any living individual, with *Thriller* smashing sales records.

Jackson was affected by an autoimmune disorder that depigmented his skin. He had a nose job to fit a Caucasian look and adapted a femininity befitting his tenor voice. To avoid having to shade fans in public, he opened a personal park, referenced on the cover of *Dangerous*, along with his friend Rockwell’s motif of eyes without a face—shielded from the source of danger. As a highly successful Black man who was confronting societal issues, the paranoid theme was appropriate.

Jackson named his ranch Neverland not because he was clinging to childhood, but because he wanted to shield lost kids in a highly corporate world. If a guest slept in his king bed or sofa in the bedroom loft, it was their choice and because they were tired, at worst being perhaps a parental oversight. Jackson thought it a ridiculous notion that anyone would think he abused the children he meant to help, especially given his extremely high visibility.

Jackson was still a virgin at the age of 33. He loved women and had even collected a vast

library of straight adult magazines. However, he also kept too many gifted books. Hitler's heir promised his second-wife-to-be that he would marry her if she could get Jackson to inscribe a compromising title. The book seemed innocuous from its cover, just boys playing, similar to an earlier gift from an alleged fan. Jackson was dosed by his new "friends" later that night, making him overlook the planted evidence.

Jackson befriended Elvis's progeny, Lisa Marie, in 1992. The passion of the pop singer began to be tested the next year, when a deadbeat dentist accused him of molesting his son, whom the man no longer had custody of. The young teen first denied the claims before starting to support them under tooth-pulling sedation. Slander from witnesses, fueled by prejudice and bribery, led to dead ends. The matter was dropped, but the distressed singer was periodically malnourished and dependent on painkillers, initially prescribed after an accident on a Pepsi commercial shoot set the King of Pop's crown on fire.

Jackson and Presley were married in 1994, uniting two generations of musical royalty. Hitler's heir offered the king of kings the vacant floor beneath his own penthouse. With a penchant for celebrity friendships, he defended Jackson to seed his narrative that powerful men are always attacked. The singer's first-class treatment seemed strange when he

might have been denied a rental from the company after first moving to New York in the 1970s. He rented the apartment to practice loving both his neighbor and enemies.

Steven Spielberg later obtained an office just beneath Jackson's former rental. He barely used it, but lent it out to the campaigning first lady, Hillary Clinton, who crashed there so often she joked that she needed her own elevator.

The Soviet Union's 1991 collapse left the US as the sole remaining nuclear superpower. Rival treaty organizations succeeded the two Cold War blocs to govern international conflict, but the branches of US government provide only a loose framework of protection against a potential tyrant in the executive hot seat—to say nothing of the devil's advocee.

With his procured wealth to thank for his enduring health, Hitler passed at the age of 110 on June 25, 1999. Braun died a year later, also, surreptitiously, in a Jewish hospital. Exactly ten years after the devil's death ascended a man who made a change, worked to heal the world, and showed that it don't matter if you're Black, white, gay, any gender, Jehovah's Witness, etc. Awaiting resurrection, the messiah's moves can trump the antichrist.

THE SECOND COMING OF ADOLF HITLER